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## SYNDICATES

# Thoughts from a foreign correspondent

**Columnist Georgie Anne Geyer discusses her 28-year career as well as the advantages and disadvantages of being a female journalist**

By Don Sarvey

She broke into newspapering via the society desk, which at the time "was the only place they would hire women," and she became a foreign correspondent when "the idea of a woman going overseas was unthinkable."

But syndicated columnist Georgie Anne Geyer was following what she loved, and that made all the difference. It's advice she still gives to aspiring journalists. "Don't ask what people need to have done," she says. "Do what you love and care about."

What Geyer loved and cared about were other cultures, language, and history. The columnist wanted to be one of those people she describes as "couriers between cultures."

Geyer was talented and lucky enough to carry it off. She was the Latin American correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* from 1964 to 1967 and then its roving foreign correspondent and columnist until 1975. Geyer subsequently wrote a foreign affairs column for the *Los Angeles Times Syndicate* from 1975 to 1980, when she switched to *Universal Press Syndicate*, her present distributor. She is currently at work on a biography of Fidel Castro.

Though an ardent feminist — she was among the participants in last fall's International Women's Media Conference in Washington — Geyer speaks warmly and somewhat wistfully of her early years when she was one of the few females in a male-filled newsroom.

In an interview during a visit to the Harrisburg campus of Pennsylvania State University, Geyer recalled that she was relegated to society news at the start of her career in 1959 because the city desk of the *Chicago Daily News* had a quota on women.

The city desk allowed only two slots for women — one covering education and one writing "sob stories about children and dogs," Geyer said. Both were filled when she



Georgie Anne Geyer

walked in with a degree from Northwestern University and experience as a Rhodes scholar in Vienna.

When Geyer finally became a general assignment reporter, she said the men saw her as "not very threatening" and treated her "sort of like a mascot."

Even so, Geyer remembered that she felt a sense of genuine camaraderie. The 51-year-old columnist said newspapering was fun then — more so than now — and that she felt herself part of a band of people "doing a great task together." Also, Geyer said there were no yuppie "careerists" or "adversarial nuts" — two categories of present-day journalists she holds in low regard.

Geyer speculated that although there were fewer opportunities for women in those days, it might in fact have been easier for those women who sought these opportunities out. Today, she said, there are "so many women who are so good" that it's harder to break in.

In her autobiography, *Buying the Night Flight*, Geyer wrote that she didn't want to become a "clone" of male journalists. To do so, she noted in the book, "would have been not only to deny my own female identity, but to lose values that should be incorporated into this and every craft."

Acknowledging that not all women would agree that there are particular

female "values," Geyer said it was her belief that women come to journalism with an affinity for understanding certain kinds of issues — including overpopulation and the exhaustion of resources. She added that women "don't come in as part of the power structure," so their minds are "freer" to grasp the world as it really is. Geyer said women aren't "socialized into" getting, holding, and organizing power.

Geyer also believes women listen better during interviews and are not as confrontational, so they're likely to learn more.

Geyer's dislike of adversarial journalists is connected to her impression that there is a loss of personal integrity in American life today.

The award-winning columnist considers adversarial journalism a "major sickness." Geyer stated that taking an "oppositionist" stance in the reporting of stories is overdone and often employed "at the service of personal ambition." She said a reporter who recently interviewed her for a story on syndicated columnists seemed primarily interested in getting her into an argument over the exact number of papers she had.

Geyer also doesn't have much use for those the columnist dubs yuppie careerists — journalists who coldly calculate their careers in advance and don't really enjoy what they're doing. She stated that she is "appalled" by people who "have their lives all planned out — as if you can plan your life!"

## New locale for 'B.C.'

Johnny Hart will be bringing his "B.C." comic to the new *Creators Syndicate*, *E&P* learned close to press time.

The 29-year-old strip, which appears in over 1,100 newspapers, is the second major feature to come to CS from News America Syndicate, since NAS was sold to the Hearst Corporation February 11. Ann Landers' column was the other.

More details will appear in next week's issue.

(Don Sarvey is a free-lance writer and editor based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.)